Grade Level: Developed for grades 6 – 8, but has been done with grades K - 12

Time Frame: About 7 weeks

Description of Project:

The "Local History Fair" is the culmination of many hours of student research on topics of their choice about their local or community history. At the Fair, teams of students display and explain projects on their chosen area of interest. These projects are arranged like a non-competitive Science Fair, to which other students, parents and community members are invited. Our fair began with a keynote address by a senior resident who described growing up in town in the 1920’s.

In the weeks prior to the Fair, each student develops and carries out interviews with local residents/mentors who know about the student’s selected focus. Community members talk with students about any number of diverse subjects; in our case (a coastal town in Maine), it was mining, ice works, early schooling, lumbering, wildlife, cemeteries, and historic buildings. Student groups research their topics further and create presentations of their learning (dioramas, models, videos, charts and posters, multimedia presentations, etc.)

Focusing on local history and resources allows diverse community residents and institutions to become partners with students in the education process and in the celebration of the town’s values and heritage. A "Local History Fair" fosters respect for hard work, careful scholarship, collaboration, different generations, civic involvement and the richly interconnected web of community life.

Our version of this project involved our two-teacher team, an Ed.Tech., and several staff members who were approached by students for assistance or expertise. Many parents, grandparents and neighbors became involved, as well as the active membership of the Historical Society and community members from four neighboring towns.

The Task:

Launching a Local History/Community Unit

Begin by brainstorming topics that can be studied locally. Our students came up with genealogy, foods, mining, lumber, fishing, education, blueberries, ice works, wildlife, clothing, population changes, fairs & celebrations, historic buildings, churches, Native Americans, quarrying, farming, gender roles, involvement in wars, etc.

Identifying Resources

Next, brainstorm possible resources. Our students suggested: maps, Historical Society, comprehensive plans, photographs, letters, newspapers, annual reports, census data, genealogies, cemeteries, local business, relatives, neighbors, artifacts, and written accounts of local history and economic activity. You will discover more as you go. We uncovered documents that the Historical Society had never come across. Do not feel that you have to have all information in hand before you begin.

Gaining a Basic Overview

Each student was asked to complete three assignments to set a good foundation. Each went through several drafts over two to three weeks. We chose timelines, maps and personal letters, but many other formats could be used to reinforce background knowledge.

1. a detailed timeline of our town’s history based on daily mini-lessons and photocopies from the bicentennial report and other documents.

2. a labeled, freehand map of our town, complete with scale and key.

3. an historical penpal letter, written as a town adolescent in 1795.

Inquiry Projects

After two weeks, students were given a week to come up with a proposal for a research project to be presented three weeks later. The proposal would address the topic, expected learnings, resources, activities, and how students would show the knowledge that they gained (report, model, display, game, role-play, video, maps, HyperCard stack, etc.). Students could work alone or in teams. Each student was required to conduct and write up an interview with someone who knew a lot about the topic. This interview requirement is what got the whole community involved. Each inquiry would culminate in finished projects, two lessons to groups of 7-8 "students", and a project notebook (proposal, notes, maps/ charts, drafts, and bibliography).

Inquiry Proposal

Each group must write a proposal for their inquiry project and present it to the teachers. This proposal should answer the following questions:

1. Who is in our group?

2. What is the major topic for our inquiry?

3. What do we want to know about our topic?

4. Where will we get our information?

5. Who will do what?

6. What activities will we do?

7. What could we do for a final product/project?

8. How will we teach the others about this topic?

Organizing the Local History Fair

Since the Historical Society got so involved with us, the date and format for the Fair were jointly agreed upon. They provided the keynote speaker and we organized the student projects. An ad was placed in the local paper inviting the community to attend and thanking 58 people by name for their assistance. This was the only cost ($95) incurred during the entire block and it was well worth it. We scheduled the gym two and half-hours, one hour to set up and take down and an hour and a half for the Fair itself. A schedule was posted in the teachers room for K-5 classes to see the projects, staggered at 15 minute intervals to avoid crowding.

Big Ideas/Essential Learnings:

\* To celebrate excellent student work and to share it with students, parents and community:

\* To bring local history and geography alive as a lifelong pursuit and collaborative venture.

\* To bring school and community together around common interests.

Assessment:

Criteria for quality work were established with students for timeliness, maps, letters, interviews, projects, presentations, and notebooks. Each was self-assessed and assessed by a teacher. Lessons were assessed by the students, based on clarity, information, respect, preparedness, quality of materials, and degree of engagement.

These web sites also contain rubrics that may be helpful in assessing student work:

\* Web Page Evaluation Rubric (Global SchoolNet Foundation)

\* Multimedia Project Scoring Rubric (Challenge 2000)

\* Self Evaluation Rubric (Region 20)

\* Multimedia Project Scoring Rubric (Region 20)

\* The Rubric Bank (Chicago Public Schools)

\* Oral Presentation Rubric (from Quest for Liberty WebQuest)

Components:

Overall Timeline

Week 1: Brainstorm topics and resources with students

Begin overview of history and geography (timeline, maps)

Week 2: Assign personal letter and continue overview activities

Week 3: Assign inquiry proposal

Wrap up overview activities

Teach interview techniques (role playing worked best)

Week 4: Inquiry teams get started

Seek information & resources

Make contacts

Write/revise interview questions.

Week 5: Conduct and write up interviews

Continue research

Work on projects

Place ad in paper

Week 6: Finish projects, organize project notebooks...

Teach lessons to peers (20-50 min each)

Week 7: Wrap up lessons

Final assessments

Letters of thanks

Local History Fair (2.5 hours total, 1 hour for set-up/clean-up, 1.5 hours for the Fair itself)

Our Student Brainstorm of Community

Things we could do:

Interview workers

Study history and future of Sedgwick

Bicentennial Book

Historical Society

Bring in people

Town Reports

Cemetery

Survey

Old pictures

Maps

Questions:

How did Sedgwick get its name?

How does Sedgwick Make Money?

How long has it been here?

What about land on Walker Pond?

Recreation?

How established?

Oldest buildings?

Newest buildings?

How many buildings?

Sedgwick in wars?

Logging industry?

Who discovered Sedgwick?

Wildlife?

Property values?

What does name mean?

Roads names and location?

Were there Indians?

Who was here first?

Population changes?

Discovery?

Type of people?

Tourists?

jobs?

Male vs. female?

Town government?

Education in Sedgwick?

Monuments?

How can we improve?

Our Student Brainstorm of Life in Township #4 and Early Sedgwick, ME

Building log cabins at first, then framed farmhouses & barns building furniture, wagons, boats...

clearing land of trees, stumps, rocks

building rock walls

raising livestock

farming

gardening

trading with Indians & other towns

fishing

merchant sailing

hunting

lumbering

cooking & baking

preserving food

gathering berries

sewing clothes

quilting & knitting

leather work

metal work & jewelry

pottery

bookkeeping

firewood: cut, split stack

school

church

Grange

town meeting & governing

post office

stores

newspapers

swimming

games & sports

races: horses, running, and snowshoes...

sledding & skating

snow sculptures

skiing & snowshoeing

ice fishing

playing with dolls & toys

instruments (violin, piano, banjo...)

singing

praying

square dancing

reading books & poetry

writing letters, journals, stories

story telling

art: painting, drawing, sculpting...

wood carving

toy & doll making

celebrations & gatherings

weddings & funerals

birthdays, Christmas, holidays

harvesting (and state fairs)

barn raisings

pie contests

corn shucking contests

quilting & spelling bees

horse pulling contests

wood sawing contests

pig scrambles

bragging about your livestock & produce

sewing circles

hunting & fishing trips

hay rides

carriage rides

child care

medicines (growing herbs... )

taking care of the sick

Technology Used/Skills Required:

The technology you use depends upon the kinds of presentations the students wish to make at the Fair and on the type of research they do. This project can be very "low tech" and basic, or it can be quite sophisticated, involving full multimedia presentations.

Other Resources:

The local historical society can be an invaluable resource. Old maps, local records, census data, newspapers, etc. are also very helpful. Trips to sites in town, libraries and museums are also helpful, but not necessary. Parental involvement enhances the project – many families may choose to investigate more on their own.

Conclusion:

Our Local History Fair served as the culminating event to showcase excellent student work, resulting from a remarkable collaboration between our 37 middle level students and the Sedgwick/Brooklin Historical Society in Maine. Having sent our students into the community, the Fair also gave us a chance to invite the community into the school and to honor the contributions of 58 people who offered their knowledge and assistance during a seven-week Community Studies Block.

The Historical Society president welcomed all of the students as official members and local historians of note. Talk about affirmation! A previously skeptical parent noted, 'Virtually every student was fully engaged the whole time of the Fair. There wasn't one discipline problem. They obviously felt really good about themselves and their work."

You won't recreate what we did, but that’s not the goal, anyway. Your students and community will produce altogether unique and unexpected relationships and discoveries, and you’ll all have an experience you’ll never forget.